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Memorandum for: THE RECORD

The attached paper was prepared jointly by SOVA and EURA. It was cabled to Secretary of State Shultz on 11 December in preparation for a ministerial meeting on Berlin.



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18 December 1984

EURM 84-10245



E U R A

Office of European Analysis

11 December 1984

MEMORANDUM

Challenges to the Western Position In and Around Berlin

During the last year, the Soviets and East Germans have taken a series of actions in and around Berlin that impinge adversely on the allied position by further eroding Western rights under Four Power agreements. In the last three days, however, they have taken steps apparently designed to defuse Western protests over these actions and avoid the appearance of an East-West confrontation over Berlin. This new demonstration of flexibility may have been timed to influence Allied discussions of Berlin issues at the NATO ministerial meeting this week. It may also reflect increasing Soviet interest in smoothing over secondary disputes with the United States in anticipation of your meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko next month.

The actions taken this year involve narrow technical matters and have antecedents in earlier disputes, but, taken collectively, they could be interpreted as an effort to demonstrate Western vulnerability in Berlin at a time of heightened East-West tension:

- On 20 February, the Soviets launched their most serious challenge to quadripartite management of the air corridors in recent years by unilaterally announcing that henceforth all Soviet temporary reservations of

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airspace in the corridors would cover the entire length of the corridors. Previously, they had requested reservations for only part of the corridors. Although the new restrictions have not reduced the number of Allied air flights to Berlin, they have, in the view of Allied authorities, created a safety hazard.

-- On 16 May, the Soviet military command in East Germany informed the Allied military liaison missions of new restrictions on their travel in East Germany,

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-- On 15 November, the East Germans closed the Glienicker Bridge, the military liaison missions' primary transit point between West Berlin and their headquarters in Potsdam. Although reopened on the same day, the East Germans indicated that the bridge could be closed again if the West Berlin Senat does not agree to its terms for financing repairs to and maintenance of the bridge.

As a result of the Soviet and East German actions this week, some progress has been made on two of these issues. The Soviets notified a reservation for less than the full length of the corridors, only the second partial reservation since 20 February. On Monday, the Soviets indicated to Allied

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officials in West Berlin that "most" of their future airspace reservations would be for less than the full length of the corridors. In addition, the East Germans and the West Berlin Senat reached an agreement on the Glienicker Bridge in which the East Germans backed away from their earlier demand that West Berlin pay for future maintenance of the bridge. We do not believe the East Germans had an interest in coming to a quick agreement to keep the bridge open, and their retreat may have been at the behest of the Soviets.

Despite these signs of Soviet flexibility, Moscow clearly has no intention of returning voluntarily to quadripartite management of the air corridors. The Soviets still are asserting the right to make unilateral adjustments in the Berlin air corridor regime, contrary to the Allied position that management of the corridors is a four-power responsibility.

We believe that Soviet frustration with the failure of their efforts to block INF deployments contributed to this year's troubling actions on Berlin issues. The air corridors and travel actions taken this year have an inherent military rationale suggesting that recommendations by Soviet military commanders in East Germany -- whose military requirements now differ considerably from those which existed at the time the access understandings were established -- have weighed heavily in Kremlin deliberations. For example, Soviet political authorities may have approved such recommendations as a convenient way to signal to the West the costs of increased East-West tensions. The degree of Soviet and East German harassment to date almost

certainly will not itself endanger the Western presence in Berlin; Western access has been inconvenienced but not reduced or explicitly threatened.

Nonetheless, the Western position in and around Berlin is not as good today as it was a year ago. The problem is essentially one of an incipient erosion of access rights stemming from incremental steps by the Soviets and East Germans to change established practices. Whenever opportunities arise, the Soviets probably will continue to seek changes in the status quo, including Western acquiescence in their interpretation of the rules governing access to Berlin. They and the East Germans also will act to frustrate any improvement in the Western position or efforts to strengthen political ties between West Germany and West Berlin.

The West faces a difficult task in responding to Soviet-East German encroachments. The three Western powers sometimes are not in agreement on how to respond. Moreover, there would be little West European public sympathy for any Allied effort to escalate issues which could be perceived as minor -- such as length of corridor reservations -- into a major East-West confrontation.

The prospects for a settlement that restores full quadripartite management of the air corridors may increase if an East-West thaw leads Soviet authorities to decide the Berlin issue is not worth the potential damage to improved relations or if the West escalates its response to unilateral actions beyond verbal protests and presents the Soviets with new risks.

In evaluating threats to the Western position in Berlin, the

West Germans sometimes present political and juridical problems for the Allies. The West Germans do not accept the Allied view that West Berlin is not legally a part of West Germany. Other activities by the West Germans, including their active pursuit of intra-German relations, sometimes have impinged negatively on status questions involving the Allies.

More serious Soviet challenges to the West in and around Berlin cannot be ruled out. The Kohl government's moves to increase the Federal Republic's ties to West Berlin are sharply attacked by Soviet propaganda and carry the risk of provoking a Soviet retaliation. At the moment, West Germany is a special target for Soviet hostility. A perceived Allied failure to contain assertive West German behavior could provide Moscow the pretext for further changes in the status quo in Berlin. Moreover, in the event that East-West relations do not develop favorably from Moscow's point of view or that US actions are perceived in Moscow as dangerous to important Soviet interests in regions less accessible to Soviet military power, Moscow might be tempted to exploit its inherent leverage over Western access to Berlin in more direct and threatening ways.

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